Canute's wife, or Virginia West; what would you say?

I left a rain coat, a crystal ruler, a diary for the year 1905 a brooch, & a hot water bottle somewhere—Either Seven Long Barn or Charleston—& so contemplate complete nudity by the end of the year. Yr.

VW

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This is simply to ask how you are—temperature 101, 102, 103 & Feeling very miserable, half asleep, taking a little tea & toast, & then, I daresay, towards evening becoming rather luminous & remote, & irresponsible: All this takes place in a room in the middle of Knole—what takes place in all those galleries & ballrooms, I wonder? And then, what goes on in Vita's head, lying under her arras somewhere, like a furry kernel in a vast nut?

Nothing has happened to me: but Leonard is lunching with Tom Eliot, & Nancy (Cunard) who telephoned the moment you left, is coming to tea—oh, & I had an interview with the devastator of all hearts, Stephen Tomlin, who is flying, like Daphne, was it, pursued by his lovers, to a

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VW

refuge on the outskirts of London, where no one shall follow him, for really he says he is now half crazy wishing to love, & to give, accepting every invitation, & then finding, what appals him; that people love him in return. I found him rather an interesting object, for one reason is that he resembles me (what other is so attaching?) in this myriad minded innumerable curiosity about others —. But, whereas they return his interest, no one returns mine. So he is gone to his retreat. After that — what? Read some of the Tempest, to compare with Defoe — But oh my dear Vita, what a rush of delight & relief it is to read poetry after prose!

NYPL

So continue your poem: & one day I will explain the torrent of my own emotions about Shakespeare — compared with Defoe. For many years I have not dared to say anything about poetry. These professors hem one down in their hen-coops. What is poetry & so on: their replies to ~~these~~ the questions have ~~me~~ kept me dumb. Shall we write a little book on poetry together? But I must have my luncheon: veal, I think, and orange; & a new kind of cake, made white red & orange; then print: then Nancy. But tell me what you are feeling? Are you aching? And if you were asked, do you like Canute,

HAMILL & BARKER 2/5/62

A very nice dumb letter from you this morning. Tell me about the Boy Scouts

52 Tavistock Square,
London,
W.C.1

Telephone: 2621 Museum.

Saturday

Isnt it damned? Here I am in bed with the flu, caught the moment I'd written to you about the delights of fever. Hot & sticky describe it. But what I'm writing about is Tuesday. I hope to be perfectly well, but infection? Shant I give it you again? I think you'd better ring up on Tuesday morning. You see, if you came, I should let you in without fail, whatever the risk for you — I do want so much to see you. And it'll still be 5 days by then. So

I dont think there can be any risk: its only conscience.

No: I'm not susceptible to the mind: only the body (I think) — Tommie, tho' sprightly as an elf, is misshapen as a woodpecker — Whereas Vita — beech trees. ~~&~~ waterfalls & ~~[illegible]~~ cascades of blue black paper — all so cool & fruitful & delicious, especially when one's got a little temperature. I'm so furious: I was to begin that wretched novel today, & now bed & tea & toast & the usual insipidities. Oh damn the body.

NYPL

But it is a great comfort to think of you when I'm not well — I wonder why — Still nicer — better to see you. So I hope for Monday.

(I'm not at all bad)

No news of Clive

yr VW.

52 Tavistock Square,
London,
W.C.1

Telephone: 2621 Museum.

Monday.

I am much better. The Dr. says that I had a rash which may have been German measles. It went almost at once, & I have had no temp. all day today. She thinks there is no risk of infection now, whether it was German measles or influenza. But if you've the least doubt about it, for God's sake don't come, for to start the journey with any kind of disease would be madness.

Of course. I *want* you to come: Enormously: its only Conscience, & you must be extra cautious.

Anyhow, I shall be in bed here

alone all day tomorrow. If you come, stay as long as you can spare: I feel perfectly well, & I'll tell you all my views on the entire world; & it would be so nice.

Yd Rw.

6 P.M. Temp. normal — so that's 24 hours normal now — I think must be all right.

NYPL

~~[illegible]~~ Tuesday

Jan 26th

1926

52 Tavistock Sqre.

Your letter from Trieste came this morning— But why do you think I dont feel, or that I make ~~pet~~ phrases ~~which~~? "Lovely phrases" you say which rob things of reality. Just the opposite. Always, always, always I try to say what I feel. Will you then believe that after you went last Tuesday—exactly a week ago—out I went into the slums of Bloomsbury, to find a barrel organ. But it did not make me cheerful. Also I bought the Daily Mail—but the picture is not very helpful. And ever since, nothing important has happened— Somehow its dull & damp. I have been dull; I have missed you. I do miss you. I shall miss you. And if you dont believe it, your a longeared owl & ass. Lovely phrases?

You were sitting on the floor this time last week, when Grizzle is now. Somehow, as you get farther away, I become less able to visualise you; & think of you with backgrounds of camels & pyramids, which make me a little shy. Then you will be on board ship: Captains & gold lace: portholes, planks— Then Bombay where I must have had many cousins & uncles. Then Gertrude Bell— Baghdad. But we'll leave that, & concentrate upon the present. What have I done? Imagine a poor wretch sent back to school. I have been very industrious; no oranges picked off the top of a Christmas tree; no ~~flat~~ glittering ~~bulbs~~ bulbs. For one thing, you must have disorganised my domesticity, so that directly you went, a torrent of duties discharged themselves on top of me: you cant think how many mattresses & blankets new sheets pillowcases, petticoats & dustpans I haven't had to buy. People say one can run out to Heals — buy a mattress: I tell you it ruins a day; 2 days; 3 days— Every time I set inside a shop all the dust in my soul rises; & how can I write next day? Moreover, somehow my incompetence, & shopkeepers not believing in me, harasses me into a nagging harpy. At last, at last — but why should I go ~~through~~ through it again? I sold 4 mattresses for 16 shillings; & have written I think 20 pages. To tell you the truth, I have been very excited, writing. I have never written so fast. Give me no illness for a year, 2 years, & I would write 3 novels straight off. It may be illusion, but (here I am rung up: Grizzle barks: settles in again — its a soft blue evening & the lights are being lit in Southampton Row: I may tell you that when I saw crocuses in the Square yesterday, I thought Mary: Vita.) What was I saying? Oh only that I think I can write now, never before — an illusion which attends me always for 50 pages. But its true I write quick — all in a splash; then feel, thank God thats over. But one thing — I will not let you make me such an egoist. After all, why dont we talk about *your* writing? why always mine, mine, mine? For this reason, I expect — that after all you're abundant in so many ways, & I a mere pea tied to a stick.

(Do you see how closely I am writing? That is because I want to say a great many things, yet not to bore you, & I think, if I write very close, Vita wont see how long this letter is, & she wont be bored) Have I seen anyone? Yes, a great many people, but by way of business mostly — oh the grind of the Press has been rather roaring in my ears. So many manuscripts to read, poems to set up, & letters to write, & Doris Dalglish to tea — A poor little thick shifty shabby shuffling housemaid, who ate a hunk of cake, & had the incredible defiance & self confidence which is partly lack of Education, partly what she thinks genius, & I a very respectable vivacious ~~vulgar~~ vulgar brain. "But Mrs Woolf, what I want to ask you is — have I in your opinion enough talent to devote my life entirely to literature?" Then it comes out she has an invalid father to keep, & not a halfpenny in the world. Leonard, after an hour of this, advised her, in his most settled voice, to become a Cook. That set her off about genius & fiction & hope & ambition & sending novels to Tom Eliot & so — & off she went, to Wandsworth; & we are to read her Essay on Pope. So.

Raymond I've seen: Clive: Mary. Siegfried Sassoon, Dadie & my French widow.

Now Vita's getting bored in Bombay; but its a bald prosaic place, full of apes & rocks, I think: please tell me; You cant think how, being a clever woman, as we admit, I make a every fragment you tell me 'bloom & blossom in my mind.

As for the people I've seen, I've fallen in love with none — but that's not exactly my line — did you ~~got~~ guess that? I'm not cold; not a humbug; not weakly; not sentimental. What I am, I wait you to tell me. Write, dearest Vita, the letters you make up in the train. I will answer everything.

I'm going to have a little dramatic society — I mean a ~~stud~~ flashy actress came to see me, who having had her heart blighted, completely, entirely, irretrievably, has most unexpectedly got work, & says will I come & see her behind the scenes — I like the astonishing profusion of these poor creatures — all painted, glittering, & unreal; with the minds of penny whistles; all desperate, what with being out of work, or in love; some have illegitimate children; one died on Sunday, & another is ill with typhoid. They think me a grotesque, semi-human gargoyle; screwed up like a devil on a Cathedral; & then we have tea, in some horrid purlieus of Soho, & they think this — my unscrewing my legs frightfully exciting —

& talking like a book. But it wont do for long. Its a snobbery of mine to adorn every society except my own.

Now I must finish, for I have to do my lecture for the school at Hayes Common on Saturday. Mary offers to lend me her motor: but no; I wont. I want Vita's motor; I want to be nicely treated by her; & I shant be.

Couldn't you write me lots more letters,

NYPL

& post them at odd stations as you pass through?

But of course (to return to your letter) I always knew about your standoffishness. Only, I said to myself, I insist upon kindness. With this aim in view, I came to Long Barn. Open the top button of your jersey & you will see, nestling inside, a lively squirrel, with the most inquisitive habits, but a dear creature all the same — Your Virginia

Are you perfectly well? Tell me.

THE HOGARTH PRESS
52 Tavistock Square, London, W.C.1
Telephone : Museum 3488.

Sunday
Jan. 31st 1926

Look, I have stolen a piece of the press notepaper to write on, & this Sunday morning about half past eleven, & I have written all I am going to write this morning. Now where are you? With Miss Gertrude Bell, I suppose. I suppose you are very happy, seeing things—lovely things. I dont know what Baghdad is like, so I wont tell you. Miss Bell has a very long nose; she is like an Aberdeen terrier; she is a masterful woman, has everyone under her thumb, & makes you feel a little inefficient. Still, she is extremely kind, & asks So-&-so to meet you, & you are very grateful to her. Enough of Gertrude Bell; now for Virginia. Shall I write the letter I made up in bed this morning? It was all about myself. I was wondering if I could explain how miserable I have been the past 4 days, & why I have been miserable. ~~Then~~ I thought about, writing them down, one can gloss things over, budge them, explain, excuse. They become more separate & disproportioned & so a ~~litt~~ little unreal — Only. I found I had to write the lecture for the girls school, & so had to stop writing To the Lighthouse. That began my misery; all my life seemed to be twas thwarted instantly: it was all sand & gravel; & yet I said, this is the truth, this gritty misery, & the other an illusion; & then, dearest, people began ringing me up to go to lunch & tea — I was asked to meet a Spaniard in Holloway, a Frenchman in Chelsea, & see an Italian dance in Soho. Why did this make me desperate? I said, I must go & meet Jacques Blanche, because he will tell me about Proust; & also Hilda Trevelyan has left me no loophole of escape; but then I must buy a hat. And last week I ~~bought~~ sold 4 mattresses. &

bought the cook new bedroom curtains. Now I must waste a whole afternoon &
suffer sheer agony in shops again buying a hat. And then, there
being no illusion in my soul, no water under my ~~keel~~ keel, I
had to dine with Wadie, & undergo a large vociferous Bloomsbury
party—sitting outside, with glass between me & everybody:
hearing them laugh; & seeing, as through a telescope, (the
poor Edith Sitwell in
looked so remote & washed up on a rock,)
her brocade dress, sitting silent. I cant tell you how intense my
unhappiness has been, starting up in the night, & clenching my hands,
all over going ~~to~~ out to dinner, & buying ~~at~~ a hat, & meeting Jacques
Blanche! And I had to take a sleeping draught. Then, in the middle of
these 4 days, I went to hear Tolstois daughter lecture on him & her
mother. And Lytton came up & praised my article in the Criterion
tremendously, which, as we never praise each others writing now,
did for the moment illumine me; & Desmond came up & praised it,
& this did not much please me, for his mind is all torn up sheets of
paper now—such a rag bag; & then Countess Tatiana spoke, &
I hated us all, for being prosperous & comfortable; & wished to be a
working woman, & wished to be able to square my life to Tolstoi.
Not that it was a good lecture. It was quite dull. But seeing his
daughter, a shabby little black old woman, a perfect lady, with his
little eyes, excited me; & made the whole world inside my head
spin round, & the tears come to my eyes—but this is what always
happens to me when the disgusting & foetid story of the Tolstois married
life is told me—by their daughter too. And also, in Hill
Street, Berkeley Square to an audience what seemed to have
Cheeks made of pâté de foie gras & sables on their backs &
nothing nothing nothing left of humanity or emotion at all.
"The ladies will know what it means to nurse 13 children" said
Tatiana: but I felt the ladies did not. Even know what it is to have monthly periods.
So I went off—with Mary in a taxi, as it happened.

52 Tavistock Square,
London,
W.C.1

Telephone : 2621 Museum.

no, you wont be jealous, not in Persia, where the air is rose-coloured & this — what you call Gloomsbury — is so infinitely remote & mean. You may have discovered entire new countries in your own soul. Your soul may be highly prominent at the moment — But what I was going to say was that none of this letter is ~~re~~ really very true, because I have been a great deal alone, two days, not able to write rather tired (but not ill — very well for the most part); & the rest of the time the usual muddle of thoughts & spasms of feeling. None of this does one ever explain.

But oh yes — I should awfully like to see you.

VW.

Friday

Dearest Creature,

I saw Clive yesterday, who says will you & Leonard & ~~me~~ I dine with him on Monday at the Ivy? If you cant, (as I fear) come to his rooms as soon as you can — We will come at 10·30, but I suppose I shant be allowed to stay late:

Would you write a line (50,000 lines) to me on the matter, & I'll let him know.

Now, he is a damned good fellow isnt he? He was as red as a lion & as sweet as honey yesterday, & so raved, with such warmth & emotion about you, that my heart was touched.* Oddly enough, he bagged one of my phrases for you —

* He gave me his version of the conversation at Merston.

said you "glowed" — "a brilliant human being" 'after Mary & Virginia the woman he would miss most" This brought us to the following petition: that you shall not go back to Persia in the autumn — for it can be proved to cause more pain than pleasure. As a poet you'll have sucked all that Persia has to give: whats six weeks with Harold to him compared with 4 months without you to us? And so on.

I got up & went out yesterday into the loveliest spectral world, all white, & with one or two lights. Then, round the Square came an eternal procession of funerals (so it seemed) walking, covered with white flowers ~~funerals~~. Only the burial of a Churchwarden I suppose, but ~~his~~ more august than Ramsay. The Dr.

NYPL

says I'm ever so much better than before Christmas. Did I have a thorough rest when I was away? So I said it was Long Barn: Early hours: lack of exciting conversation: staying with the aristocracy in short. "Ah I see: good food & no mental or physical strain!"

What else is there? I must stop: try to polish off my lecture; & tomorrow begin the novel. & send my bed back & resume my struggle with the world — oh & Vita won't be here next week to ~~do~~ adulterate it — you know what I mean — Its a word I cant find at the moment.

The party went off. Lady Oxford was refused admittance by Molly MacCarthy. & like the barbarous incivility & independence of Bloomsbury manners. Mrs Courtauld was also outed. So they kept themselves to themselves; & got tipsy.

Here's Roger ringing up to ask me

to go to the Sargents show: Doris Daglish writing to see us: "a little work would keep me from ~~degra~~ using my writing in a degrading way" & so on.

But I'm rather spoilt, & want Vita; & not Roger: & not Doris: & not Mary: & not nobody else.

What time will you come on Monday? dearest Creature?

Now though this has been written, by the glare of the snow, sitting up in bed, in precisely 10 minutes for the cook to post when she goes to buy a dish of meat, it is not a dumb letter. Dogs letters are.

Yr VW.

NYPL